



ATR



Activism



Activism

This pamphlet is about our roles as politicized actors. This is about punks and politics. It is an explanation and a criticism of two different forms of activism, lifestyle activism and group activism. It is an attempt to analyze the ways we try to change our world—our struggles, our victories, and our failures. It is also a recognition of the difficulty and the contradictions involved in actively resisting our system. Finally, it is a call to network and communicate—for those kids involved in destroying the system and building an alternative to our world, it is a critical analysis of where we are, where we are going, and what may help us get there.

If we really believe in fighting for a better world, our resistance must be in our minds—using our imaginations to criticize existing life and discover better ways to live. And it must be through our actions—in the real world, in our everyday lives, practicing our criticisms and working with others for a change, for a REVOLUTION that includes more than just ourselves.

needs to evaluate the commitment and motivation of each member and discuss tactical issues of secrecy, going undercover, trust, and law enforcement retaliation. A knowledge of the local, state, and federal laws as well as the court system is also helpful to groups engaging in illegal activities.

D. 3. The Media?

Should the group make use of the media? Which media (mainstream or underground, print or tv) should the group tap into? In the group discussion of this issue, we recognize that the media has its own agenda and will pursue this by the way that they “spin” stories. How the media presents a group, what pictures, quotes, or sound-bites they use and where they locate the group’s issues on the public spectrum are all questions the group must address if they choose to use the media. On a deeper level, the group first decides if they are going to solicit popular support for their projects, and if so, what must they do to gain the kind of support they need.

D. 4. Coalition Building and Solidarity Groups

Part of the task of building popular support is being able to build coalitions and solidarity ties with other activist organizations. The exact procedure of coalition building is worked out by the group with other groups that may share similar visions or tactics, or that have a resource availability (funds, ideas, labor power, media) that our group may want to share. Yet in building coalitions, the group must give up some of its own autonomy to work with and support these other activists. How important to the group is resources that another group could offer? Finally, how important is it to network and organize with and around the actions of other activists?

III. The Intersections for a Revolution

A combination of a lifestyle of activism and participation in group projects fulfills the two pronged attack that works toward social change. How can we be examples of a revolutionary lifestyle without also working with others toward a long-term project of revolution? We must make some compromises just to survive in this system, yet where do we resist and how far can we go? In spite of this paradox, we must learn how to simultaneously work within the system to build alternatives of production and alternatives of ideology that will sustain a NEW world. While also working to actively destroy and debilitate the institutions and the ideologies that sustain our system, we must consolidate our victories and remember our history. This is the task. Are you down?

Write, communicate, network:

Eric Boehme / ATR zine
118 Raritan Ave.
Highland Park, NJ 08904 USA
eboehme@eden.rutgers.edu

dictate the amount of group time spent on discussing group dynamics--groups run by consensus will obviously devote more time to this process than autonomously active groups.

C. 1. The Political is Personal

Working on inter-personal relationships as a part of group discussion may seem irrelevant or a waste of time, yet this reinforces our belief in personal lives having political consequences. Groups interested in their revolutionary potential also need to realize that intra-group squabbles based on personal disagreements are counterproductive. Often some of the ideologies an activist group is ostensibly fighting, reappear through personal problems--power struggles, egos, sexism or racism are issues that are sometimes played out in the flows of group dynamics. The lines are often difficult to draw between what is private (if anything, as is sometimes the case in collective living situations) and what should be publicly discussed by the group.

C. 2. Clearinghouses

As a part of a group agenda, we make time for "clearinghouses" where personal relationships are discussed, grievances are aired and issues of what is public and what is private are dealt with. The group decides what is "going too far" in these discussions, what procedures should be developed for dealing with inner-group tensions and when discussion should be furthered or shut down.

D. Practical and Tactical Issues

In organizing an activist group, a number of practical or tactical issues crop up that determine the direction and the function of the group. These issues should also be discussed in terms of assessing the situation and the desires and motivations of each activist.

D. 1. Traditional Methods of Protest

Group activists work through many traditional channels of organized protest. Organizing demonstrations, petition drives, boycotts, mailings, teach-ins, or printing a newspaper are all traditional ways that groups choose to resist our system. The value and effectiveness of traditional protest methods needs to be evaluated by each group though before committing themselves to pursuing non-traditional forms of resistance like street-fighting, riots, guerilla warfare, bombings, etc.

D. 2. Legal v. Illegal Activities

Group projects can involve legal or illegal means of accomplishing the group's goals. As a starting point, groups decide whether or not they will engage in illegal activities and whether changing circumstances will also change the group's mind. Recognizing the consequences for the individual activists if they are caught, the group

I. Lifestyle Activism

A. An Attempt at a Definition?

We all know what we are talking about here. A lifestyle devoted to change, a way of living where we look toward the future by living our lives NOW in a revolutionary way. Veganism, reducing our commodity consumption, environmentalism, stealing, dumpstering, squatting, not wearing animals, using political knowledge to shop for our commodities—where we buy our groceries, records, clothes, books, etc.—fostering critical and intimate relationships with our friends where we deconstruct all the isms of our culture, making our "private" lives "public" through the networks of zines/spoken word/scenes/gossip. . . (Help me think of some others)

B. Positive Aspects

Making the personal political is our way of saying that our lifestyles look toward a future society. In this way, we begin to feel like we are actually making a change, on a local, minute level where we resist the overwhelming and dominating influence of institutional capitalism. Through lifestyle activism, those of us who are critical of our world try to find ANY way to resist.

B. 1. Interconnectedness

Lifestyle activism, through the rhetoric we've developed and sometimes in our actual practice, opposes the capitalist ideology that we are all separate, isolated individuals and that nothing we do has any effect on others. Through our lifestyles we come to recognize the complex and deep connections our actions have on a world around us. We begin to realize that how we live our lives on a day to day level, CAN and DOES effect a change on the world around us. --Whether it is on a micro-level, like the development of our personal relationships, fighting our own acculturated sexism or homophobia or objectification of others for profit, or on a macro-level (like the decrease of the consumption of animal products), lifestyle activism reconnects our personal lives to a larger political whole.

B. 2. Re-introduction of Subjective Action

As we get older, jaded, tired and fed up with resisting our society, lifestyle activism keeps us mindful of our power as an individual actor--we are neither the isolated individual whose action does not matter, nor are we only able to act as a part of a "revolutionary class," where our individual actions are meaningless unless they are part of a mass action by a "unified" class.

D. The Contradictions of Lifestyle Activism

I think that in almost every instance of lifestyle activism, there will be inherent contradictions that will arise if a lifestyle becomes an end, not a means toward change. Conflicts in our rhetoric and our ideas that will arise as we try to practice our lifestyle separate from any long-term project of social change, separate from the struggles of others. These contradictions are a result of trying to live in a system rife with contradictions, yet at the same time trying to resist the system. If we do not have a coherent goal, a long-term plan of imagination that we try to realize through our lifestyle, our activism becomes just another phase of rebellion, just another commodity that capitalism can sell on the open market, or just another ghetto where we can contemplate our navels, consolidate our comfort and live our lives without any hope for real change.

II. Group or Organized Activism

A. An Attempt at a Definition?

A group of individuals, committed to working together toward practical and theoretical goals not addressed by our system or by other groups, gathers to participate, not only in the work of the group, but also in decision making and devising goals. The group's practical and theoretical goals may center around a variety of specific ideas or actions—actions that the group hopes will reinforce or act as a catalyst for some type of change in our social system. Group Activism relies upon the commitment of group members who are critical of our system and want to: 1) Destroy or criticize the system as it currently exists, and/or, 2) Attempt to build new ways (new institutions, ways of living, groups, etc.) that will realize their goals of a better society.

A. 1. Power?

Group Activists, as a beginning, may want to discuss their ideas concerning power. Is the goal of the group to gain some kind of power (institutional, electoral, popular, media)? What will be the nature of this power? In these questions, the group realizes that just by being a group (rather than individual activists), they have some kind of initial empowerment and in coordinating group actions, a chance to gain more power. Yet I think that some of the reasons we start a group is that we are frustrated and disgusted at who holds the power and how they use their power in our system. In our group efforts, power should be a constant topic of discussion—how we as a group can gain more power, what type of power we want, and how we can resist the kinds of power, the authoritarianism, which we oppose in this system.

A. 1. a. Fear of Power

Many activist groups oppose any use of "power" and any discussion gaining power is frowned upon. Because we languish under a system of power that relies on economic and political power, because the ways we see power being used in our daily lives involves the exploitation or subjugation of others, as activists we hesitate to seek ANY kind of power. We are wary of replicating in our groups, the forms of power that are operative in our system, where power—becomes an end in itself, not the means to achieve our goals. Yet not all power is inherently exploitative. Power is needed to consolidate a position of opposition to our system and to fight and destroy the underpinnings of that system.

A. 1. b. Positive Power

If we truly believe that a revolution is needed in our world, access to power is essential. Without power, we are just another group on the margins fighting to live our lives the way we want, without interference from others in the easiest and most comfortable lifestyle we can manage. Positive power comes from working with others, not as antagonistic individuals but from empowering ourselves in our identities and our personal lives. We struggle together to build a better world, not based upon power gotten at the expense of others, but from our collective power. Granted power will have to be taken (either peacefully over time or violently) from those NOW in power, yet how else are we to change our world? In our groups, in deconstructing traditional forms of power and in realizing a new power that comes from an equal respect and regard for each of our skills, diversities, and contexts, we take the first step to building a new paradigm of power at odds with and away from this world.

A. 2. Specific Organizational Direction

In formulating our groups, we need to ask ourselves what we want to accomplish, why we are gathering together and how we will pursue our goals. What needs will we fulfill by being a group? What ideas will propel our work together? Food Not Bombs, book stores, sexual abuse survivor groups, street theater, collectives, consciousness raising groups, shelters, reading groups, street gangs, the International Socialist Organization, legal advocacy groups, police brutality watches, guerilla fighters, (help me think of others. . .) are all groups that work together toward specific actions and practical projects that realize goals resistant to or opposing our current system. Resistance to our system can take many forms and occur on many fronts—productive, distributive, ideological, educational—resistance can also come from joining or helping the victims/survivors of our society. Each group decides where they are needed most or what work they will undertake.